TERPSICHOREAN SONICS

by Ivan Mijačević, with Alexandra Baybutt

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ABOUT TERPSICHOREAN SONICS

Terpsichorean Sonics is a system of education for training dance artists in the fundamentals of music theory through somatic movement improvisation and composition.

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

This presentation is in three parts.

We first outline the aims and structure. Then we introduce ourselves briefly and share the genesis of this system.

In the second part, we explain the topics that are given specific focus, ideally over three years. These topics, many of which concern the elements of music, are nothing new to musicians. Yet, recontextualised for dance education, they serve as a systematic foundation from which music theory is learned through embodiment to elicit understanding, and greater freedom of choice, in dancing and listening. This recontextualisation also reflects something back to the education of music and musicians.

The third part is a short task you can participate in. It highlights a topic, and a fundamental part of our research. That is, that we all have habits and individual perceptions that may differ from the facts and physics of music theory. These habits can be limiting on the one hand, which is why we developed this education, but on the other hand, they are part of the rich expression of our uniqueness.

We acknowledge Terpsichorean Sonics falls within the lineage of integrative, embodied music and movement educational approaches, traceable to figures such as Dalcroze and many others.

PART 1

AIMS AND STRUCTURE

Humans are affected by sound, whether we notice it or not. Our obedience to sound has a profound effect on the choices we make. With Edgard Varèse, we argue music is the organisation of sound. Therefore, it is helpful to understand that the four parameters of sound, duration, amplitude, pitch, and timbre, construct the elements of music. Similarly, it is useful to approach any kind of dancing from the fundamentals of movement.

Because of the heightened separation of disciplines in arts education, we observe that music education in movement and dance training contexts is rarely to the level of specificity it could be to equip participants with necessary kinaesthetic and auditory skills that develop refined decision-making processes in dance composition and improvisation.

Our aims are to not only educate and empower dance artists*, but to reframe the notion of dance techniques to include deeper and richer music theory knowledge as a somatic practice. Whilst enriching the education of dance artists, we also argue that systematically demystifying the material properties of movement and metaphysics of sound is an act of democratizing knowledge.

In Terpsichorean Sonics, music - as art and science - is approached with precision and sensuality. It is presented and studied as essence, as what music is, through ongoing analysis, experience and embodiment of the phenomenon of what music shows. This educational system is concerned with movement-sound relations, and not with making movement analogous to sound, nor to its production. Whilst honing knowledge, we do not seek to inhibit creative choice.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF THE AUTHORS AND GENESIS OF THE SYSTEM

Ivan Mijačević (1979, Socialistic Republic of Yugoslavia), is a maker, performer and educator in the fields of music, performing and visual arts. He holds an MA in dance dissemination from the Cologne Academy of Music and Dance in Germany. Terpsichorean Sonics has been facilitated at the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance,Cologne Academy of Music and Dance, School for New Dance Development Amsterdam, Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts, National Dance Academy Rome, Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, Zagreb Academy of Dramatic Art, Alma Mater Europaea – ECM, Performact, Tanzfabrik Berlin, Drama Teatro Modena, Yasmeen Godder Studio and World DanceSport Federation, amongst others.

Alexandra Baybutt (1984, The United Kingdom) brings her expertise as a professional dance artist, movement educator and researcher. She gained a qualification as a certified Laban Movement Analyst in 2010, and for the past decade has taught on certification programmes in Europe and in China, as well as in Higher Education and professional dance training contexts. Her PhD was awarded by Middlesex University.

Alexandra and Ivan met in 2005 on the danceWEB Europe scholarship program, in Vienna, Austria.

The genesis of Terpsichorean Sonics can be traced earlier to the turn of the millennium, being first taught in the early 2000s, as a way of integrating music and dance knowledge, and Ivan's interest in educational formats. From 2013, **Terpsichorean Sonics** gained additional clarity by drawing from the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System (LBMS), a versatile taxonomy to analyse any movement phenomena. Its spatial components are what differentiates LBMS from other somatic modalities, making it extremely helpful for synthesizing the relations between movement, dance, music and sound. LBMS offers specific tools for approaching the bodily, spatial, qualitative and relational aspects of human movement. In its teaching and learning, mark-making is a significant part of bringing movement observation and experience to consciousness. This is known as Motif, which differs from LabanNotation and from the concept of motif used in music theory. Parts of LBMS are mentioned here to offer some examples of how it supports our approach. Certain words are capitalised to show these as specifically LBMS terms (for example, Weight, Effort).

PART 2

THE TOPICS

Overview

13 topics provide the focus for sessions, though **Terpsichorean Sonics** extends beyond these. These are taught and learnt through various formats including individual and group improvisation and composition exercises, lectures and discussion. We emphasise ongoing observation of self and each other in space, with the always-already present movement and sound.

The order of the topics is deliberately set, and recognises that we integrate the knowledge of a topic when exploring the next one. In this regard, **Terpsichorean Sonics** is a non-dual system in which we differentiate elements, and acknowledge their ongoing integration and co-existence.

What are the topics?

(1) Identifying individual habits and perceptions of sound and movement

Keyword: Comprehension

The aim is that dancers comprehend an understanding of a 'unit' as the basis for the aboutness in any communication. Through simple but complex tasks, dancers are supported in discovering the undisputable units in music theory, alongside their subjective and divergent experiences of them.

These tasks refine ear-eye relations, in the ongoing inner-outer perceptual game of responding to self, other, and environment. This topic is the foundation from which to understand the following topics.

(2) Articulation: Part 1

Keyword: Accent

To describe one single sound and how it is built, the concept of a sound envelope is used. In acoustic phenomena, this is known as 'attack, sustain, decay'. In electronic and digital phenomena, as 'attack, sustain, decay, release'. This single sound in the theory of music can also be understood as an accent. In music, an accent is an emphasis, placed on a particular sound (sometimes referred to as a note) or set of sounds. Types of accents include dynamic, tonic, and expressive (or agogic).

The aim is to increase attention to initiation, continuity, and resolution of a single sound through movement. Tasks encourage the exploration of what is one movement, in contrast to multiple initiations. Only when this singularity is grasped, can repetition and variation, similarity, difference and contrast be explored more precisely. The developmental progression is towards building skills to create and notice what is in the foreground or background of changing phenomena.

(3) Articulation: Part 2

Keyword: Connectivity

This furthers the idea of an accent, extending it in space and time. The most commonly used are legato, staccato, non-legato, and portato. These help to distinguish approaches to transition or continuity between multiple sounds and movements, and therefore connectivity within one's body, and in space with others.

Understanding and embodying Laban's Effort theory supports exploring qualities and how they connect. Notions of stillness, and active or passive Weight, illuminate making and perceiving different kinds of accents.

4) Dynamics

Keywords: Amplitude, duration and diversity

This emphasises the treatment of (a) amplitude and duration, and their appearance, maintenance, and disappearance, as well as (b) the heterogeneity of a homogeneous structure, to advance the practice of instant composition.

This includes ongoing exploration of Weight and Flow as foundational components of movement, progressing to more complex patterns of sudden and gradual dynamic change using Effort theories and Shape phrasing.

(5) Melody

Keyword: Sequentiality

The focus becomes the pitch class set (for example, all the Cs in all octaves). Tonalities, sometimes referred to as key, derive from scales, and modes, and are the result of the relations, or intervals, of the pitch class set, creating a hierarchy.

Melodies can be in one or more tonalities at once, but they do not have to be, following the technique of dodecaphony, as well as other compositional approaches, which are attempts to contribute to the democratisation of sound.

Practically, melody is explored through different means, starting from simple spatial pathways in the studio as a way to treat a singular movement-sound event with an understanding of sequentiality. The trace-form of movement, that is, what is remembered of a pathway, becomes material to understand the formation of melody as a spatial and temporal event.

Producing the melody of a dance is explored relative to how it began and how it develops at the level of body initiation. Making this analogy to movement becomes a question of initiation and interruption, for example, through the use of successive kinetic chains in the body or leaping to another initiation not in anatomical order.

(6) Harmony

Keyword: Simultaneity

This addresses the simultaneous expression of pitch class sets, known as chords, which can be thought through tonalities, but not necessarily, following dodecaphony or other forms of serialism. This is explored within one body and in space with others, and how it might be shared over time. Harmony relates, for example, to decisions of quantity such as body parts, the number of dancers, the amount of simultaneous initiations in the body, and when they occur.

(7) Instrumentation

Keyword: Instrument

A major difference between the training of musicians and the training of dancers can be the question of what the instrument ‘is’, though this difference is less obvious when a musician is a vocalist. In dance, the dancer is the instrument, but not only. Like musicians, they also use instruments, which in very fundamental terms are the available space, and the floor, or more precisely, the base of support (which would include a wheelchair). The sensitivity of dancers to themselves, to space, to gravity and to ground exposes the potentiality of all these and their limitations. From a somatic movement education perspective, dancers’ sensitivity over their instrument involves, for example, the refined differentiation and use of the systems of the body (e.g. bones, organs, muscles, fluids and so on).

Instrumentation, then, discusses the selection of 'instruments', such as body systems, body parts, individual movers, spaces, and sounds of musical instruments.

(8) Rhythm: Part 1

Keyword: Metre

This approaches periodicity within metric structures. When talking about rhythm it is good to first talk about periodicity. Periodicity concerns regularly occurring structures that help organise the production of the experience of time. The intervals of an occurrence in time gives rise to a pulse or beat. This creates tempo, that is the instruction and the effect of the speed of execution.

When examining pulse more closely, subdivision and multiplication, and the addition of these, are ways that create metre. This asks us to consider where accents appear within that metre. The appearance of accents within a metre creates rhythm.

Music notation groups metric units into bars that are segments of time corresponding to a specific number of metric structures and their beats. Dividing music into bars provides structures to reference precise locations within a musical composition.

The point of view of a dancer is often to connect or bring together events to create a sense of a whole, or a ‘phrase’, whilst a musicians’ perspective is often to subdivide and control a whole more precisely. Refining understanding and use of metre and rhythm removes unnecessary reliance upon counting, if we recall an embodied experience of them.

In addition, both musicians and dancers have finite capabilities. We need to breathe, our muscles tire. Learning to control energy, and maximise the use of recuperation and preparation in pauses, develops the experience of metre further.

The suspension of sound opens a space that might be called a pause or a rest. ‘Rest’ however, is misleading as the suspension of a sound is not a suspension of action (for example, muting a string, stopping striking). A pause in movement terms can be referred to as ‘stillness’. Active or passive stillness, can relate to the mover’s inner attitudes towards attention, intention, decision, and progression.

Polyrhythm is a combination of different simultaneously occurring rhythmic patterns. Each pattern is in itself a configuration, full of driving energy. If we hear them together, there is an additional reciprocal reinforcement between the two energy sources.

Humans are constantly in a state of polyrhythm. Simply standing entails relating to gravity and base of support, and is a constant ongoing adjustment of muscles and ligaments creating polyrhythms, in relationship to the other systems of the body. Add more movement, then more people, and we can understand dance as ongoing polyrhythms of multiple complexity.

(9) Rhythm: Part 2

Keyword: Dramaturgy

This refers to macro-structures in or of a whole composition. The aim here is to develop the awareness of tracking what has happened in the music, and individual and group responses in movement. Remembering in order to compose further becomes a collective sense of taking care of a whole composition, and finding shared meaningfulness. Rather than the micro-analysis of individual events or units, ‘dramaturgy’ is a short-hand way of connecting what a rhythm of the elements of music means in the creation and experience of a whole composition.

(10) Texture

Keyword: Overall sound

This approaches ways of combining elements of music in a composition and determining the overall quality of the sound and movement in a piece. The most common textures in music theory are monophony, biphony, homonophy, heterophony, and polyphony. Here we learn their technical means of production through the embodied tools and differentiation cultivated through the previous topics and tasks.

(11) Poetry

Keyword: Language

This focuses on vocal music, opening the rich topic and continuities of breath to sound to voice to word to languages. Exploring words beyond their apparent meaning leads to questions of intention and communication, and informs dancers of the use of their voice as movement, and their movement as language.

(12) Ambiance

Keywords: Mood and character

In the elements of music, this specifically means the mood or character created, or what ambience is created for something. Developing awareness of the differences between working site-sensitively and site-specifically appears in this topic. It draws attention to how music changes a certain space, and how a dance changes in a certain space. Creating ambiences, and acknowledging them, is an invitation to maintain and transform them.

(13) Introduction to Form

Keyword: Structure

This topic is explored specifically through Arnold Schoenberg's seminal work, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (1967), and a book by Władisław Tatarkiewicz, *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics* (1980).

Form, in its multiple meanings, concerns the complex relationships between parts that create structure, no longer about simply the elements of music. Explored in greater depth is a comparison between sound, movement, and space, examining the possible ways of treating the relationships between dance and music form on the level of motif (motive) and the motivic development. Dancers can use this knowledge to understand what they hear in a music composition more precisely, in order to respond through its compositional logic when composing their dances.

As mentioned earlier, **Terpsichorean Sonics** as a system is actually more than the 13 topics outlined. It continues with another set of sessions delving into the topics of composition as elaborated in the works mentioned above, but the topics offer substantial embodied knowledge on the foundations of movement-sound relations as we see them.

PART 3

The third and final part of this presentation is a task called:

LISTENING AND MOVING FOR UNITS

If possible, please stand up so you can still hear and see the screen. (Press pause to do this, and when you're ready, press play again).

This task exposes 'musical units'. We mentioned earlier that **Terpsichorean Sonics** is concerned with the education of music theory, but also with individual habits of listening. This task is about deciding when the end of a unit is, rather than focussing only on beginnings. It seems obvious, but after someone has spoken, then we reply. Except in dancing, often a 'reply' begins sooner, anticipating what was meant without waiting to hear or see it come to an end. This task is to refine how we sense ourselves in communication, and further differentiate how communication is achieved or interrupted.

So,

- Have your hands by your sides.
- Feel how you make contact with the floor, or base of support.
- Sense the distance from the top of your head to whatever is above it.

In a moment, we will play some music.

- When you hear a unit end, raise your hand above your head then immediately bring it down again.
- Keep listening for the ends of units, as you understand them, for the duration of the music.
- Your hand gestures will keep marking the ends of units until the music stops.

There is no correct 'unit' to mark. Follow your instinct. You might be in conflict with the composer's intention, and that will be perfectly fine.

So, before we begin,

- Maybe close your eyes briefly if it helps, and take a breath in
- Centre yourself, breathe out.

The music will begin shortly.

[Music plays]

That was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Serenade No. 13 in G Major, K. 525, Eine kleine Nachtmusik, Allegro, from 1787.

Something that is so well-known is nevertheless subjectively experienced.

Some questions for you: how did it go? Were you happy with your units? Would you do it differently if we did it again?

Even though some of you might have been perfectly relaxed, others may have experienced some tension, cramp, or frowning. Did you maybe tap along, or make other extra movement in an (unaware) attempt to find the pulse?

These questions are intended to bring awareness to what you did, and acknowledge it. This is the crucial aspect of somatic movement repatterning that asks you to become aware of habits and tension-holding patterns in order to embody the task differently next time, even if you choose exactly the same units. In LBMS these habits are called Shape Flow. It is a largely unconscious but useful form of self-regulation. Performers need to know their Shape Flow, as these do communicate, and therefore become perceived as part of their performance by audiences and fellow performers.

We will do the task again, with the same extract of music.

Give yourself the chance to listen anew, and notice different units within the same composition, and mark them with the lifting of the hand.

Don’t judge yourself yet on how you lift your hand and all these additional questions about your Shape Flow, as there is no need to inhibit the primary task of marking the ends of the units.
This time, you will see us doing the task at the same time as you.

You will see and experience how we are doing the task. With this new visual information, you can perceive how you respond to any variations. This realisation might produce a judgement of whether you are doing it right. As we said, you are perfectly fine, enjoy the nuances. Now you will have the opportunity to experience, and appreciate all of our perceptions.

Even if we listen to the same somehow objective external stimulus, we have our own internal perception of it. We create a common composition of dance in relation to our responses. By this we will create a wonderful quartet of you, Alexandra, Ivan and Wolfgang (through the interpretation of David Parry and the London Philharmonic Orchestra).

So, again, maybe close your eyes briefly if it helps, and take a breath in. Centre yourself, breathe out. The music will begin shortly.

[Music plays]

If this was a workshop together in the same non-digital space, we would take some time to discuss what happened, ask questions and reflect, in order to continue with more tasks that would become even more specific and complex. We hope that you have gained some insight and physical understanding of the many layers of **Terpsichorean Sonics**.

Terpsichorean Sonics is the intellectual property of Ivan Mijačević, with Alexandra Baybutt, that came to fruition over two decades of research. If any of this inspired you, you are welcome to quote us, bearing in mind that this system is a holistic one and this presentation barely skims the surface. Please feel free to contact us if you or your institution are interested in working with us in the future.

Contact: terpsichoreansonics.system@gmail.com

GLOSSARY

***Dance artists.** Throughout this text and the presentation we refer to ‘dancers’ as a short-hand for dance artists. We acknowledge ‘dancer’ to be a historically problematic figuration. Rather than assume a split between dancer and choreographer, dance artist includes, and is not limited to, those skills pertaining to dancing, performing, choreographing, and co-creating. This last point is especially crucial as the cooperative and collaborative dimensions of making performances always involve many instruments, whether named in the credits or not.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ivan Mijačević (1979, Ptuj, SFRY), is a maker, performer and educator in the fields of music, performing and visual arts.

Ivan holds an MA (2015) in dance dissemination from the Academy of Music and Dance Cologne, and a diploma (2008) in dance performance and choreography from the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance. He studied music pedagogy (1998-2004) at the University of Maribor and classical piano performance (1997-2000) at the Maribor Conservatory of Music and Ballet. In 2005 he was a danceWEB Europe scholarship recipient.

His collaborative, site-sensitive, transdisciplinary work with art-collectives inability crew, sz3, danceCO, TASK 15, and with theatre companies has been presented and awarded throughout Europe, Central and South Americas, in Asia and on the World Wide Web. It takes an emancipatory direction by reframing knowledge, what constitutes it, and the spaces in which it can be co-created. Reverse-engineering situations, his practice aims to empower all involved by radically questioning the neoliberal socio-political and economic clenches of the current times. Ivan facilitates increased autonomy in decision-making processes with an emphasis on decolonising the imagination. His work takes a holistic, integrative approach to technology/ies, as research permeates production, and it is deliberately vague where art and life diverge. His socially-engaged art faces political problems through lateral, oblique practices that demonstrate the critical potential of art to comment upon and intervene in contemporary life.

For the past twenty years, his practice has been inspired by studies and collaborations with (among others) Katie Duck, Jan Fabre, Julyen Hamilton, Lisa Nelson, Susan Rethorst, Ingo Reulicke, Martin Sonderkamp and David Zambrano, and ex-Yugoslav artists Dragana Alfirević, Matej Kejžar, Kaja Lorenci, Dušan Murić and Snježana Premuš (among others).

Terpsichorean Sonics has been facilitated at the Salzburg Experimental Academy of Dance,Cologne Academy of Music and Dance, School for New Dance Development Amsterdam, Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts, National Dance Academy Rome, Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, Zagreb Academy of Dramatic Art, Alma Mater Europaea – ECM, Performact, Tanzfabrik Berlin, Drama Teatro Modena, Yasmeen Godder Studio and World DanceSport Federation, amongst others.
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Alexandra Baybutt (1984, Sheffield, UK), works as an artist, movement educator, and researcher. Alexandra approaches life and work through a praxis approach, guided by ongoing questions, ignorance, forgetting and reworking.

Alexandra holds a BA in Contemporary Dance Theatre, Laban, London, UK (2005), and an MA in Performance and Culture, Goldsmiths College, London, UK (2007). Her interdisciplinary PhD occupies the fields of dance studies, postsocialism, festival curation and politics, and was awarded by the University of Middlesex (2020). She has a certification in Laban Movement Analysis, Bartenieff Fundamentals and Somatic Studies from LSSI/Janet Kaylo, accredited by LIMS, NY, USA. She is a Registered Somatic Movement Educator with ISMETA. Alexandra also holds certifications to teach vinyasa yoga and pregnancy yoga from Yoga London. In 2005 she was a danceWEB Europe scholarship recipient.

Alexandra teaches on certification programmes in LBMS in Europe and China, and has taught student dancers and actors in Higher Education in universities in the UK, as well as professional dancers, actors, musicians and opera singers in workshops and privately. She teaches LBMS and improvisation in training contexts like Independent Dance (London), as well as for Barefoot Opera, and now online in the current climate. She has supervised an MA music composition student at the The Royal Conservatory of Music in the Hague, NL. Reflecting upon her work in education, she co-wrote a paper on the experience of teaching and learning LBMS in multiple languages for the CAET/Creative Arts in Education and Therapy journal with colleagues from the USA and Netherlands.

Her work as a dance artist since 2004 includes working collaboratively with musicians, filmmakers and designers, and she has created and presented works across Europe. Notable collaborations include with inability crew, with Tor Collaboration (film artists Yuri Pirondi and Ines von Bonhorst), with musician David Somlo, with artist Mette Sterre, with artist Guida Miranda, and with choreographer Stephanie Felber. An ongoing project Genus Classification by Altitude of Occurrence has taken place in different site-sensitive contexts in the UK, with artist Moi Tran, with composer Huw Morgan, and choreographer Stephanie Felber. She has worked as movement director and coach for theatre and opera since 2010, and more recently as a dramaturg for dance, with choreographer Tania Soubry (UK/Luxembourg). Alexandra really likes collaborating but occasionally writes solo research projects and papers (conferences she has presented at include PSi/Performance Studies international, and the ASA/Association of Social Anthropologists). Her prose can be found on the Something Other

performance-writing website. Space - inner space, kinespheres, performative, social, political, and architectural - are ongoing fascinations in her art, work and research.
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